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Among Collegiate Educators, a Disturbing Hegemony

By John Leo
Special to washingtonpost.com's Think Tank Town
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As college students return to campus this fall, we are reminded of the academic controversies of the past year. These events -- associated with the names Norman Finkelstein, Ward Churchill, and the Dartmouth Trustees -- raise profound questions about the health of our universities. Have they forgotten their academic purpose in pursuit of radical ideological causes?

[MindingTheCampus.com](#) has a short answer to that question: yes. It is a new enterprise that will seek to provide necessary supervision for universities that have increasingly cut themselves off from the broader society. During his brief term as president of Harvard, Lawrence Summers noted this insularity when he spoke to the faculty about patriotism, praised the ROTC and the military, and warned that "coastal elites" were drifting dangerously away from the mainstream and its values. He was right.

One need only look to the many professors who falsely accused the Duke players of rape last year, or to the large number of academic supporters that Ward Churchill gained, or to the growing threat to free speech on many campuses highlighted by such organizations as the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (F.I.R.E.), to understand that our universities require closer scrutiny-and reform.

A curtain has been drawn around the academy, inside of which the protection of certain favored ideas trumps intellectual exchange and the search for truth. [MindingTheCampus.com](#) seeks to foster a new climate of opinion that by contrast favors civil and honest engagement of all sides, offering vigorous, ongoing debate for readers concerned about the state of American higher education.

Our goal is civil conversation about the universities, about what has

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happened to them, and what must be done to make them genuinely open institutions, with no established or protected ideas. Speech codes, double standards, censorship, politicized departments, an obsession with preferences and identity groups at the expense of standards and a broad curriculum—all are preventing the universities from fulfilling their true mission. Not only should Americans be concerned about the content of university education; there also needs to be an investigation of its costs and its quality. Too much of what goes on in American higher education today takes place behind the scenes. Transparency is an overused word, but we think the campuses could use a lot more of it.

As the new college year begins, we will no doubt be hearing about many more Ward Churchills and Norman Finkelsteins. But the past year reminds us that our universities should not be held to lesser standards than other organizations that purport to be impartial. Balance and true diversity of thought are the indispensable characteristics of any higher education worthy of the name. Students, alumni, professors and administrators should look to MindingTheCampus.com not as a threat, but as an ally in the effort to renew a rich American tradition of education that values such academic balance and intellectual pluralism.

John Leo is editor of MindingTheCampus.com, a web site of the Manhattan Institute.

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